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ABSTRACT

Dropout-prone students at two Oakland high schools were identified and divided into control and experimental groups at both schools. Experimental group students received special counseling attention during the year. Attempts were made at providing them with part-time jobs. No significant differences in dropout rates between the experimental and control groups as a whole were found. At one school experimental group boys had a significantly lower dropout rate than control group boys; at the other school a non-significant difference in the opposite direction was found. Planning and supervisory problems may have limited the effectiveness of the program and certainly reduced its value for providing research information. (Author/CG)

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RESEARCH REPORT ON THE OAKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT: The Experience of the First Year, 1964-65

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I. Introduction

Plans for a Youth Opportunities Project in Oakland were first developed in 1963 and were incorporated in a project proposal submitted by the Youth Opportunities Board of Alameda County to the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training of the U. S. Department of Labor. The proposal had two goals:

1. The development of in-school programs aimed at improving the holding power of the school and improving the preparation young people received for entering the labor market; and
2. The establishment of Youth Opportunity Centers which would help out-of-school, out-of-work youth in the area move into full-time employment.

A number of proposal documents were prepared, generally conforming with the above described goals. In 1964, $100,000 of the Ford Foundation grant to the City of Oakland was allocated to the support of the in-school component of the Youth Opportunities Project. The out-of-school component of the Project was to have been supported by Office of Manpower, Automation and Training (OMAT) funds. When these latter funds failed to materialize, the Project had to be extensively revised.

In the Spring of 1964 it was suspected that the Federal Government might not contribute its share of the Project's support. It was decided at this time, that because of staffing and phasing problems which would otherwise result, the in-school component would have to be begun in the fall even if the Federal funds were not in hand. Project principals believed that initiation of the in-school component without the out-of-school one would not be as serious a limitation as attempting to begin the whole project later in the school year. By mid-October it was obvious that the Federal funds would

not be available until mid-Spring of 1965, at the earliest.

Apparently without the exchange of any memoranda among the City, the School District, other Youth Opportunity Board Signatories, or the Ford Foundation, the City and the schools substantially modified the Project for its first year. The new goal of the first year program as it can be reconstructed from later staff evaluation papers (1, 7, 8, 9, and 10) and from recent interviews was: The evaluation of the effectiveness of an intensive motivational counseling casework technique in reducing dropout among selected dropout-prone students. It is this objective which is evaluated in this paper.

Review of Literature:

The problem of dropout from high school has stimulated great research interest in recent years. The bulk of this research has focused on the etiology of dropout. It has generally been found that dropping out is related to a relatively small number of variables. A smaller proportion of dropout studies have focused on the manipulation of variables associated with dropout, with the goal of reducing dropout among treated students.

Lichter, et al (4) describe a treatment program conducted by a private guidance clinic in cooperation with a public school system. The authors found that casework services to emotionally disturbed dropout-prone students effected . . . "a better adjustment in emotionally disturbed students, improved school performance and prevented premature school leaving."

An in-school program (2) demonstrated that providing potential dropouts with a "warm personal relationship" made up for a "lack of self-esteem and feeling of not being wanted." Experimental group students dropped out significantly less often than control group students. Precisely what was

provided by the researchers and the meaning of self-esteem are not indicated in the study.

A very carefully conceived and executed study of the impact of manipulation on dropout-prone students was reported by Langstreth et al (3) in early 1964. The study was a three year program evaluating the impact of a special curriculum, an improved teacher-pupil ratio, improved counseling, and part-time employment on dropout reduction. Control and experimental groups were matched in terms of attendance, academic skills, grades, age, I.Q. and aggressiveness-passiveness in the school setting. There was no difference in the dropout rate between the experimental and control group. In discussing their study, the authors suggest two reasons why no reduction in dropouts occurred: (1) the program procedures were too limited in scope or were introduced too late in the students' school life, and (2) the experimental program was not sufficiently integrated with the on-going school programs. The authors felt the most important outcome of the study to be:

> ". . . the present findings indicate there are no panaceas or easy cures for the drop-out problem. The characteristics of the present program are believed to be representative of current conceptualizations concerning the dynamics of the potential drop-out and his interactions with the school environment. Developing a prevention program on the basis of the conceptualizations is no guarantee of success . . . both theoretical formulations and their implementations need to be carefully developed in order to maximize the probability of success of such a program."

II. Description of the First Year Program:

The Project began operation in the Oakland School District in September, 1964. The in-school component of the Project was assigned to the Special Urban Educational Services Department of the Oakland Public Schools. It was operated in Castlemont and McClymonds High Schools.

Table I presents enrollment data for the two schools. Tables II and III

Table I

Enrollment on June 11, 1965

Castlemont

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total
10th	450	456	906
11th	410	434	844
12th	366	348	714
Special	54	50	104
Total	1,280	1,288	2,568

McClymonds

10th	195	201	396
11th	158	148	306
12th	125	126	251
Special	57	29	86
Total	535	504	1,039

Table II

Castlemont Leavers, 1964-65[a]

Non-Dropout

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
10th	62	10.7	73	12.8	135	11.7
11th	52	9.9	37	7.2	89	8.6
12th	22	5.1	30	7.3	52	6.2
Total	136	8.6	140	9.0	276	8.8

Dropout

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
10th	69	11.9	43	7.5	112	9.7
11th	59	11.4	46	8.9	105	10.1
12th	41	9.6	33	8.0	74	8.8
Total	169	10.7	122	7.9	291	9.3

Total Leavers

Grade	Number	Rate
10th	247	21.4
11th	194	18.7
12th	126	15.0
Total	567	18.1

[a]Leaver rates are computed on the basis of the total number of students in the category (sex and/or class, or total) who were enrolled or who had dropped out by the last day of the year, e.g.: the 62 10th grade Castlemont non-dropout boys who left represented 10.7 per cent of 10th grade Castlemont boys who were enrolled or who had been enrolled and had left by June 11, 1965.

Table III

McClymonds Leavers, 1964-65[a]

Non-Dropout

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
10th	28	9.7	28	9.9	56	9.8
11th	50	19.2	43	17.7	93	18.5
12th	14	8.5	17	9.4	31	9.0
Total	92	12.0	88	12.0	180	12.0

Dropout

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
10th	65	22.6	54	19.1	119	20.9
11th	52	20.0	52	21.4	104	20.8
12th	25	15.2	37	20.6	62	18.0
Total	142	18.5	143	19.5	285	19.0

Total Leavers

Grade	Number	Rate
10th	175	30.6
11th	197	39.7
12th	93	27.0
Total	465	42.1

[a]Leaver rates are computed on the basis of the total number of students in the category (sex and/or class, or total) who were enrolled or who had dropped out by the last day of the year, e.g.: the 28 10th grade McClymonds non-dropout boys who left represented 9.7 per cent of 10th grade McClymonds boys who were enrolled or who had been enrolled and had left by June 11, 1965.

present leaver data during the year for both schools.[1] McClymonds dropout rates were generally higher than those of Castlemont. Overall leaver rates tended to decline between the 10th and 12th grades at both schools, although at McClymonds, 11th graders of both sexes left at a higher rate than either 10th or 12th graders.

Records of meetings which were held from September on at both high schools indicate that, before the term started, it had been decided that the in-school component would consist of special counseling and job development activities with selected dropout-prone students. In both schools experimental and control groups would be established to demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment procedure in reducing dropout.

A. Objectives

(1) To demonstrate the effect of special counseling for reducing drop-out-prone students.

(2) To place dropout-prone students in part-time jobs.

These objectives were abstracted from the Progress Report prepared in the spring of 1965 by the Project staff at Castlemont (8). The objectives describe the extant program well.

B. Program Operation

In September, procedures were established at both schools to provide

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1. The two words below are used extensively in this paper and are here defined:

1. Leavers: Any student enrolled in school who for any reason, including graduation, transfer, etc., does not complete the term, or who leaves before the term is completed and returns (6).

2. Dropouts: Any leaver who has not graduated and who, as far as the school can ascertain, has not enrolled in another high school elsewhere (6).

for the selection of students for Project involvement. Students having high dropout potential were identified and placed in a control group or an experimental group, where they were to be given intensive counseling and guidance with the problem or problems which were associated with their dropout-prone tendencies.

Selection: Students in each school were referred to the Project by grade counselors, vice-principals, and teachers. Criteria were developed for each school by Project staff personnel and those who were referring students to the Project. These criteria are presented in Tables IV and V.

The project staff at each school made an alphabetical list of the names of the students who had been referred to the Project. Taking alternate names from this initial list, experimental and control groups were formed at each school. As attrition occurred in the experimental groups, additional students were assigned to the experimental groups and to the control groups. At Castlemont the experimental group included 190 students, while the control group included 296. At McClymonds the experimental group consisted of 121 students, while the control group included 54. No attempts were made to balance the groups with respect to sex, grade, or ethnic group membership.

An unknown number of the Castlemont experimental group dropped out of school before being contacted by Project staff. Doubt existed for some time among the Castlemont staff over whether to continue to include these students in the Project. In addition, many students' folders did not indicate whether they were experimental or control subjects. Those with no indication of counseling services were considered control subjects for purposes of this study. Thus, the resulting Castlemont experimental group was smaller than it would otherwise have been; it was much smaller than the control group.

Table IV

Castlemont Referral Criteria

Primary: Students falling into any one of these four categories:

1. Chronic Truant: five unexcused absences in twenty consecutive school days.
2. Discipline problem: three disciplinary referrals in the first three weeks of school.
3. Students returning from exemptions.
4. Students returning from balance of semester suspensions.

Secondary: Students falling into any two of these seven categories:

1. Age promotions.
2. Three or more "F" grades for the first marking period.
3. Three or more credit units short of grade level.
4. Two or more years short of the grade level reading skill.
5. Self-referrals, i.e., students announcing their intention to drop out.
6. Young mothers.
7. Non-returns.

Revised Criteria, adopted in January

1. Chronic Truants: Students who have been absent for twenty days or more within any marking period of forty-five days.
2. Disciplinary Problems: Students who have been put on a short day program because of misbehavior.
3. Return exemptions.
4. Students returning from balance of semester suspensions.
5. Students who received three or more "F" grades in any single marking period.
6. Students who are three (3) or more units short of the number of units prescribed for the grade level.
7. Self-referrals: Students who alert their counselors or the Vice Principal that they plan to drop out of school.
8. Young mothers.

NOTE: Every student who was referred had to have an I.Q. score of 75 or above. Students in the M. R. program could not be included in the pool.

Table V

McClymonds Referral Criteria[a]

1. Students who enter McClymonds High from Junior High on age promotion.
2. Students who have been referred to the Attendance Supervisor or Guidance Consultant.
3. Frustrated students who seek alternative methods of satisfaction by cutting classes, school, or students whose values are often directly contrary to the rules of the school, or who flaunt authority.
4. Students who have fewer than 10 units after completing 11th grade.
5. Students who have fewer than 4 units after completing 10th grade.
6. Students returning to McClymonds after attending school only part of the previous year.
7. Students who reach their 18th birthday during their 11th grade school year.
8. Any students who at the end of the first semester are failing 2 or more courses.

[a]Numbers 1 through 7 were original criteria. Number 8 was added in January.

The McClymonds experimental group, on the other hand, was much larger than its control group. This occurred because the McClymonds staff transferred control students into the experimental group as openings materialized in the latter group through attrition. Thus, additional students who entered the Project at McClymonds were often first assigned to the control group and later assigned to the experimental group. For evaluation purposes, any student assigned to the experimental group, regardless of whether he was a member of the control group prior to that assignment, is considered here only as an experimental group student.

Services: The Project counselors attempted to contact each student as soon as possible after he was assigned to the Project experimental group. The student was told that he had been contacted because of the probability of his dropping out of school and that the counselor would be staying in touch with him the rest of the year. He was also given information about the nature of the counseling program and was told that he was welcome to contact the counselor at any time. As early as possible after the student's assignment, the counselor would arrange for weekly counseling sessions with the student.

A record of the actual services offered to experimental subjects is not available. Although the counselors recorded the date and topic of some of the counseling sessions in many of the students' file folders, not all were recorded. About one fifth of the Castlemont experimental group students' files show no recorded sessions at all. The number of recorded sessions varied widely among the remaining students.

Variation in the School's Project Organization: The Program differed somewhat between the two schools. Castlemont had four and one-half (full-time equivalent) staff members assigned to the Project, while McClymonds

had two and one-half. Both schools had half-time clerks. Two of the Castlemont staff members were full-time special counselors, as compared with one at McClymonds. One of the staff members at Castlemont was a special counselor and attendance supervisor for attendance problem students in the program. At McClymonds, the staff member working with attendance problem students had also to work part-time with non-program students. How much time was spent with each type of student was not specified.

Records and Data: Record keeping activities differed in the two schools. Record forms were devised for keeping extensive information on the Project students and on the services provided to the experimental students. However, none of these record forms was filled out by the McClymonds staff, whereas, at Castlemont, most of the students' folders had some information filled in. Eighty per cent of the experimental students' folders, for example, included some indication of counseling contacts, but less than 70 per cent of these folders contained an indication of the reason the student had been assigned to the program. The students' reading level was recorded in less than half of the subjects' files, while total SCAT scores were available in about half of the files.

Job Development: The second goal of the first year program was to attempt to develop jobs for students leaving or getting ready to leave school. A Work Experience Coordinator was assigned to the Project. The mechanics of this task are not specified anywhere but appear to be: a) the development of jobs for (apparently fewer than 100) program subjects, b) the selection and reception of referrals of students who were to be placed in jobs, and c) individual and group guidance and counseling of these students while they were in their jobs (1).

According to the final report of the Work Experience Coordinator (1), only one job was developed for Project students. The number of experimental students who were referred to the Coordinator is unknown, because he was working with experimental and non-experimental group students concurrently and no separate records were maintained. Group counseling sessions at Castlemont were offered to 26 experimental students in two groups which met 12 and 13 times respectively. Attendance was about 50 per cent per session.

At McClymonds, there were counseling sessions for four groups. One of these groups, which included 16 students, met eight times; a group of 12 also met eight times; and a group of seven met six times. Attendance at the McClymonds group meetings also averaged about 50 per cent.

III. Results

1. Dropout reduction in the experimental groups: The frequency of dropout was observed for the experimental and control groups in each school and is presented in Table VI (for both sexes combined).

The Castlemont data indicate that the dropout rate for the experimental group was somewhat lower than for the control group, but the difference is not statistically significant. Moreover, Castlemont experimental and control group students' files did not, in all cases, carry experimental or control group identification. In order to process the data, all students whose files contained records of counseling interviews, or who were otherwise identified as experimental group members, were treated as experimental subjects for analysis. Students without such records or who were otherwise identified were treated as control group members. Some experimental group members who dropped out of school before contact by Project staff are probably considered

Table VI

Dropout Frequencies in the Project Schools

	Castlemont				McClymonds			
	Experimental		Control		Experimental		Control	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Dropouts	51	26.1	95	32.1	33	27.3	9	16.7
Non-dropouts	139	73.9	201	67.9	88	72.7	45	83.3
Total	190	100.0	296	100.0	121	100.0	54	100.0

here as control group students. To the extent that this occurred, control group dropout rates are likely to be inflated. This situation also accounts for the fact that there were 106 more students in the control group than in the experimental group.

The McClymonds data indicate that the dropout rate for the control group was lower than for the experimental group. However, the difference probably reflects, at least in part, the reassignment of a biased subgroup of the control group to the experimental group, i.e. the most dropout-prone students were transferred.

The frequencies of all leavers versus non-leavers in the experimental and control groups were compared and no statistically significant differences between the groups were found at either school.

2. Sex differences in dropping out: When data for the two sexes are considered separately (Table VII), no clear-cut differences emerge. It is true that experimental group boys at Castlemont dropped out significantly less often (beyond the .01 level) than control group boys. On the other hand, 42 per cent of the Castlemont experimental group girls dropped out, as compared with only 21 per cent of the experimental group boys. The difference is significant (beyond the .01 level), but the higher rate of dropout among the girls could be explained by the inclusion of more pregnant girls in the experimental group than in the control group. Unfortunately, data are not available to indicate whether this was the case. Moreover, although the experimental girls' rate was higher than the control girls' rate, the difference is not statistically significant.

McClymonds data show no significant differences at all. Although experimental group boys' 29.0 per cent dropout rate was higher than the 16.6

Table VII

Project Dropouts by Sex

CASTLEMONT

Experimental

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	109	79.0	30	57.7	139	73.9
Dropouts	29	21.0	22	42.3	51	26.1
Total	138	100.0	52	100.0	190	100.0

Control

Non-dropouts	124	68.2	77	67.5	201	67.9
Dropouts	58	31.8	37	32.5	95	32.1
Total	182	100.0	114	100.0	296	100.0

McCLYMONDS

Experimental

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	61	70.8	27	77.2	88	82.7
Dropouts	25	29.0	8	22.9	33	27.3
Total	86	99.8	35	100.1	121	100.0

Control

Non-dropouts	30	83.1	16	84.2	45	83.7
Dropouts	6	16.6	3	15.8	9	16.7
Total	36	99.7	19	100.0	54	100.4

Table VIII

Project Dropouts by Grade

CASTLEMONT

Experimental

Grade	10th		11th		12th		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	62	74.6	47	69.2	30	77.0	139	73.9
Dropouts	21	25.4	21	30.8	9	23.0	51	26.1
Total	83	100.0	68	100.0	39	100.0	190	100.0

Control

Grade	10th		11th		12th		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	94	70.2	68	67.3	39	64.0	201	67.9
Dropouts	40	29.8	33	32.7	22	36.0	95	32.1
Total	134	100.0	101	100.0	61	100.0	296	100.0

Table IX

Project Dropouts by Grade

McCLYMONDS

Experimental

Grade	10th		11th		12th		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	46	70.7	26	74.3	11	68.8	88	82.7
Dropouts	19	29.2	9	25.7	5	31.3	33	27.3
Total	65	100.9	35	100.0	16	100.1	121	100.0

Control

Grade	10th		11th		12th		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Non-dropouts	11	91.7	23	82.1	11	78.6	45	83.7
Dropouts	1	8.3	5	17.7	3	21.4	9	16.7
Total	12	100.0	28	99.8	14	100.0	54	100.4

per cent rate of the control group boys, the difference did not quite reach the .01 level of significance.

3. Grade differences in dropping out: The Castlemont experimental group 12th graders experienced a dropout rate of 23.0 per cent, as compared with 36.0 per cent for the control group 12th graders. The difference is significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. Although the control group's rate was slightly higher in both of the other grades, in neither case is the difference significant.

The dropout rates of the control groups at McClymonds were lower than those of the experimental groups in all three grades. None of the differences, however, is statistically significant.

4. Ethnic differences in dropping out: At McClymonds, nearly all students were Negro in 1964-65, and all of the Project students were Negro; hence analysis of ethnic group differences in dropping out was not possible. Although, the student body at Castlemont was considerably more mixed, information on ethnic group membership could not be obtained for 74 per cent of the cases in the two groups. Thus, it was impossible to undertake an analysis of ethnic differences in dropout rates at Castlemont, also.

5. Job placement: The only data available on job placement come from the report of the Work Experience Coordinator (1). He indicated that 15 students were receiving job supervision from him during the first marking period, but did not provide information as to whether they were in the experimental group or not. (The Work Experience Coordinator was in a position to supervise students on jobs other than those he developed.)

IV. Discussion

The data do not lend themselves to much discussion since they show scarcely any significant relationships. However, their weaknesses deserve some consideration.

a. Demonstration of the Effectiveness of Motivational Intensive Counseling on Dropouts.

Evaluation of the results of the 1964-1965 program provides no indication as to whether counseling was either effective or ineffective in reducing dropout. It is true that dropout rates were significantly smaller for experimental group boys and for 12th graders in the experimental group at Castlemont. However, the fact that some experimental group boys and 12th graders left school before being contacted by the Project staff casts doubt on the actual significance of these results. Such cases would have been classified in the control group and have increased the dropout rate in the control group. Yet classifying them in the experimental group would have been misleading, since they received no special counseling.

b. Placement of Dropout-Prone Students in Part-Time Jobs.

As indicated above, the report of the Work Experience Coordinator showed that 15 students received job supervision from him during the first marking period, but did not provide information as to whether they were in the experimental group or not. Thus no conclusions can be reached on experience with job placement, but it is apparent that relatively few experimental group students could have been placed.

c. Deficiencies in the Data.

The fact that deficiencies in the data presented a serious problem in

attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of the program is apparent. At Castlemont there were wide variations in the types of information that were collected and inserted in the files of the students who were included in the program, while at McClymonds no information was placed in their files.

No plans were made to collect ethnic data, while most files did not indicate whether the student was a member of the control or experimental group. Nor was a master list available with regard to group membership.

In part the lack of adequate records was attributable to the failure of Project principals to develop in advance a document which would describe the information needed, define responsibilities for data collection, and suggest the types of analysis required.

The information considered in this report was largely gathered after the first year of the project was over. Data had to be assembled from the files of the students in the experimental and control groups, inadequate as they were, and from other school records.

d. Operational Supervision.

Linked with the problem of inadequate data was the problem of lack of operational supervision of the Project during the first year. The McClymonds staff did not collect information which the school principal and Project staff had agreed should be collected. Moreover, as experimental group members dropped out of school, control group members were shifted to the experimental group. In the case of Castlemont, some students were lost from the experimental group because they dropped out of school before any staff contact. Project staff members at both schools actively sought special action from the vice-principals' offices in the cases of experimental group students involved in discipline or truancy problems. Yet this special treatment invalidated both citizenship and attendance data as criterion variables for the study.

Summary

Dropout-prone students at two Oakland high schools were identified and divided into control and experimental groups at both schools. Experimental group students received special counseling attention during the year, and attempts were made at providing them with part-time jobs. No significant differences between the experimental and control groups as a whole were found. At one school experimental group boys had significantly fewer dropouts than control group boys; at the other school a non-significant difference in the opposite direction was found. Planning and supervisory problems may have limited the effectiveness of the program and certainly reduced its value for providing research information.

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